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# From Paradise to Destroyedmichygen: An Analysis of the Function of Names in We Need New Names by, NoViolet Bulawayo

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From Paradise to Destroyedmichygen: An Analysis of the Function of Names in *We Need New*

*Names* by, NoViolet Bulawayo

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**Abstract**

NoViolet Bulawayo's writing in *We Need New Names* (2013) privileges the voice of Darling, a black-female child from Zimbabwe and draws the reader into her world and story that is not told through conventional Western discourses of the media or history. Bulawayo renames historical events in Zimbabwe and the immigrant experience in order to reclaim a narrative that is often overlooked because of race, nationality, gender, and age. The names used within the novel are used to challenge the linear narratives of immigration that reproduce the false ideology of easy upward mobility and the disregard of diasporic realities in order to reclaim the historical and social narrative of the Zimbabwean immigrant/postcolonial novel. Bulawayo's writing and naming allows Darling's voice to emerge in a Western social sphere that mainly disregards the Zimbabwean and immigrant voice.

### **Introduction**

*We Need New Names* (2013) by, NoViolet Bulawayo captures the voice and life of a child named Darling and her journey from Zimbabwe to America. Darling is infectious, youthful, and she reclaims the immigrant narrative using names to aid her in finding a voice in a world where she is dominated because of her age, race, gender, and nationality. Darling's journey extends from the fictitious city of Paradise in Zimbabwe to Destroyedmichygen, or Detroit, Michigan. Darling pronounces Detroit, Michigan as Destroyedmichygen because of the language barrier and also due to suggested irony by Bulawayo on Detroit's 2008 economic recession. The novel is split in two between Zimbabwe and America but the novel does not always operate in a linear fashion as Darling often refers back to historically significant periods of time through her memories.

Through naming and privileging the voice of a black-female-child Bulawayo challenges the oppressive Western discourses of Othering, the act of a monolithic entity placing people in a subordinate position based upon their race, gender, age and nationality. Additionally, Bulawayo's use of naming draws attention to the status of Darling as a subaltern, an individual that is usually one who was colonized and/or a female of color that is rendered completely powerless because of their social status. The oppressive forces of Othering and the subaltern are represented by Bulawayo naming the economic, social, and historical chaos that has occurred in Zimbabwe under Mugabe's rule, the remnants of British white colonists and their presence within Zimbabwe, and Darling's experiences in America as an immigrant. The names used within the novel are used to challenge the linear narratives of immigration that reproduce the false ideology of easy upward mobility and the disregard of diasporic realities in order to reclaim the historical and social narrative of the Zimbabwean immigrant/postcolonial novel.

The names that Bulawayo chooses for Darling to reclaim her own history and experiences are a combination of metaphorical, indirect, and through a collective voice of “we” and “they” that speaks to the immigrant perspective as a whole. The novel jolts the reader into Darling’s story through the names of Budapest, The Sickness, a tin shanty town named Paradise, “We”, and Lamborghini, just to name a few. Examining the function of names in the novel and how they speak to the larger picture of the immigrant narrative is done through Henry Louis Gates’ definition of signifying as “the figurative difference between the literal and the metaphorical, between surface and latent meaning” (82). Analyzing the names used within the novel by connecting how they signify the larger historical and social aspects of Zimbabwe and immigration furthers the argument as to how Bulawayo is reclaiming the immigrant narrative through the privileged voice of Darling renaming her experiences.

Bulawayo privileging Darling’s voice is a way in which she gives a narrative back to Zimbabwean history as it is often misrepresented as subordinate through a Western lens. Othering is a term that can be used to define and discuss the concept of alienating and separating people from the “main stream” because they differ racially or economically, for example. Literary theorist, Edward Said, noted for his work on the discussion of Othering and the oppression committed by the West through the discourse of Orientalism explains: “an absolute distinction being made between the dominant colonizing West and other peoples or ‘underground selves’ not only ‘Orientals’ as such, but also Africans...” (Waugh 351). Darling’s homeland of Zimbabwe was occupied by The British Empire, then known as Rhodesia until 1964 and in 1980 after a civil war the country became legally independent. The representation of Zimbabwe depicted in the novel does address the topic of Othering through the names used to describe the economic, social, and historical aspects of Zimbabwe.

The oppression that Darling experiences and aims to overcome with finding her identity and voice within the novel also takes on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's definition of the subaltern. Othering and subaltern are not interchangeable terms, even though both terms share the commonality of oppression. Othering takes a look at the monolithic structure, political powers, governments or culture as a whole, and its responsibility for creating a separation amongst certain people because they differ from the "norm". Spivak elaborates that many people have an incorrect definition: "everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie...in postcolonial terms, everything has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism-a space of difference" (45). Through naming Bulawayo opens up the "space of difference" that Spivak is discussing by opening up a narrative on Zimbabwe and immigration that is often foreclosed through Western discourses of the media and history. Spivak's famous essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" questions if one who is rendered powerless due to their gender, colonization and lack of Western identity or value can speak for themselves without the presence of a monolithic force. In a way, Bulawayo is answering Spivak's question with Darling reclaiming and renaming Zimbabwean history and postcolonial identity through the immigrant narrative that seeks to find her voice and identity living in America.

The narrative is charged with honesty from the perspective of a black-female-child, who holds no ulterior motive but to tell a story from a person that is underrepresented and overlooked in Western society. The way in which Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe, AIDS, rigged elections, and the immigrant experience are told through the avenue of names reshapes the bildungsroman to include the Zimbabwean and feminine perspectives and to challenge Western views of Othering. Bulawayo writes and names in such a way that demonstrates how "Postcolonial literatures

proliferate and change[s] constantly, even as postcolonial critical studies in the academy continue to grow apace” ( Boehmer 214). *We Need New Names* opens up the door to discuss and see a side of Zimbabwean history, not through the lens of the media or Western textbooks, and to read an experience of a girl who, at times, painfully finds a voice and identity in a Western sphere who just thinks “she’s another girl from poor Africa”.

### **NoViolet Bulawayo**

The author of the novel’s own name is representative of her ties to her homeland of Zimbabwe. Bulawayo’s writing in *We Need New Names* is a conglomeration of her own personal life, the stories of those she knew, and the story meant to reach every immigrant, who like herself, needed a new name. The names that she chooses represent certain aspects of Zimbabwean history and identifying with the struggle of identity that immigrants undergo while moving away from their homeland. Bulawayo’s use of naming draws attention to topics such as AIDS, Zimbabwe’s political struggles under Mugabe, and the process of leaving the homeland which are all also arguably intertwined with her own life.

Bulawayo’s life began in Zimbabwe and through her writing and choosing of names she takes on the task of individualizing a very complex history that Zimbabwe holds. She was born on December 10, 1981 in Tsholotsho, Zimbabwe. NoViolet Bulawayo is a pen name and her legal name is Elizabeth Zandile Tshele. The meaning of Bulawayo’s pen name was revealed during an interview , “‘NoViolet’ literally means ‘with Violet’, (after her mother, who died when Bulawayo was just 18 months old); and ‘Bulawayo’ is Zimbabwe’s second largest city, where she grew up” (Rosen 35). Bulawayo created a pen name that pays allegiance to her homeland of Zimbabwe and also to the remembrance of her mother. Before Darling’s story even began, Bulawayo was using her own pen name as a way of connecting herself and then her work to

Zimbabwe.

The significance of names in the novel also appears alongside the topic of AIDS as both Darling and Bulawayo suffered the loss of loved ones to the disease. In the novel, Darling's father becomes so emaciated from the disease that Darling gives him the nick-name "Bones" to signify his skeletal state as well as Bulawayo "lost a brother and sister to AIDS" (35).

Bulawayo's use of names also correlates with the topic of AIDS in the novel as Darling and others refer to the disease as, "The Sickness". The use of "The Sickness" in conjunction with AIDS signifies the very real taboo that surrounds AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa as well as Bulawayo calling attention to the taboo of AIDS by using a euphemism through a child's voice to demonstrate the social anxiety some hold in Zimbabwe when it comes to AIDS. As of 2013 Bulawayo is "working on a collection of AIDS stories, which began as a memoir about all that she has lost" (35). Both Bulawayo and Darling lose loved ones to AIDS and in telling those personal stories of those who have suffered through the use of different names represents the economic and lack of access to health care that are connected to the plight of AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Both Bulawayo and Darling go through a massive transitional part of their life as they immigrated to the United States. Bulawayo lived in Zimbabwe until the age of eighteen and her father sent her to live in Kalamazoo, Michigan with her aunt and to attend college to study Law. Darling also immigrated to Michigan from Zimbabwe to live with her aunt to attend school and it is estimated that she did so around 2008 because the novel does not explicitly state dates. The name of Destroyedmichygen weaved into the novel by Bulawayo demonstrates the personal relationship of Bulawayo's experience in immigrating into an economically despondent part of the United States.



Although Darling and Bulawayo share similar biographical qualities like geographic locations and loss of loved ones to AIDS, the entire novel and the characters within the novel are not solely based on Bulawayo's personal experiences. Shortly after Bulawayo moved to the United States, Zimbabwe went through even more political and economic turmoil under President Mugabe. Bulawayo conveyed that after "hearing all this desperation, horrors we couldn't do anything about? I wrote about it" and "the kids in the book were inspired by my friendships" (Rosen 35). The names given in the novel to some of Darling's friends include Chipso, Bastard, and Sbhoo and each of these children take part in Darling's life and Zimbabwe's history. Although Bulawayo did not experience some of the horrors that her friends and family back home in Zimbabwe did, she represents and reclaims those experiences through the names given to the children remembering their homes being demolished by bulldozers, their adventures in the city of Budapest that represent the postcolonial division between race and economic class, and the ideals that they hold with America being a land of freedom and opportunity.

Bulawayo also focuses on the immigrant as a whole in *We Need New Names*, which asserts itself as an important aspect to Bulawayo personally as she herself is an immigrant. In the chapter "How They Lived" Bulawayo "uses the first-person plural voice to be inclusive of all immigrants" (Rosen 35). Bulawayo has yet to formally discuss her personal experiences living in the United States but the inclusive voice written in *We Need New Names* could possibly lend to some of Bulawayo's experiences of being an immigrant in the United States and desiring to give a voice to those who are seen as an Other. The names that Bulawayo uses to address the collective is "we" and "they" and the tone in which she uses these names is not only inclusive but also understanding. She expresses through this collective voice the struggles of Americans understanding a foreign accent, assumptions that people in America hold about countries that are

“less than”, and the economic fight that immigrants face with working the jobs that nobody else wants in order to survive.

The biographical context of Bulawayo’s life is important and relevant to this thesis on *We Need New Names* as both the main character and the author share many similarities. Bulawayo’s personal devotion to Zimbabwe and her experiences are essential to understand and include as it gives the novel a powerful voice that rings with truth and experience. Bulawayo disclosed that: “You don’t forget home” (35). And she very much keeps her memory of Zimbabwe alive in a truly new and refreshing way through the voice of a child, and using new names in order to reclaim the geographical, historical, and post-colonial aspects of Zimbabwe and immigration from the oppressive Western lens. Her writing echoes the concerns of Spivak because the novel is written in an individual way through naming that does not “privilege the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of history” (Spivak 76). Bulawayo’s devotion to Zimbabwe through her own biographical ties and offering up a narrative through the use of different names from the voice of a black-female-child is to dispel Western notions of Zimbabwe and immigrants living in the United States. The use of naming that Bulawayo employs is meant to go against ideas of Zimbabwe and the immigrant experience that have been seen through the West. Bulawayo places Darling in pivotal times in recent Zimbabwean history that reflect the tyranny of Mugabe’s rule in order to reclaim those moments from the perspective of a child who is often overlooked because of her race, age, nationality, and gender.

### **The Bulldozers**

Bulawayo chooses to un-name the historical event of Operation Murambatsvina that was a government program enacted by President Mugabe to rid Zimbabwe of poor housing communities with bulldozers. Darling’s narrative of this historical event is through the name of

“The Bulldozers”. The name is much more than just a simple term used to represent how a child would see their home obliterated by numerous bulldozers that came out of nowhere. The un-naming of Operation Murambatsvina is a way in which Bulawayo incorporates a metaphor for Darling and people in Zimbabwe being oppressed and mowed over by their own government. On a larger scale the un-naming also gives Darling an individualized voice and a presence in this historical moment that was covered by the Western media, through the likes of CNN and the BBC. The media’s interpretation of Operation Murambatsvina furthers the idea of Zimbabwe being an Other because its representation of this government tyranny did not include any dialogue from the people it actually affected. It was all literally viewed through a Western lens. Through un-naming Operation Murambatsvina Bulawayo gives Darling a voice and a way to reclaim this crucial moment in her life and Zimbabwean history.

Operation Murambatsvina was enacted by President Mugabe to eradicate poverty by using violent force on those who were lower class. The Operation began: “In mid-2005 the Zimbabwean government embarked on...Operation Murambatsvina (‘Restore Order’) was designed to eradicate ‘illegal’ housing and informal jobs, which directly affected hundreds of thousands of poor urban residents” (Potts 273). Mugabe’s corrupt leadership in Zimbabwe resulted in no infrastructure or legal land allotment for people to build homes and communities. This concluded in people, usually of lower economic class, to build homes wherever they could find space. It is estimated that “in July 2005 that around 650,000 to 700,000 people had lost either the basis of their livelihoods or their homes, or both” (276). Mugabe’s plan to “Restore Order” was to bulldoze communities with no warning and to push those people to live in rural areas of Zimbabwe and Darling’s memories of the bulldozers are seared into her budding mind.

Bulawayo describes Operation Murambatsvina, but does not specifically name it in the

novel; it is arguably alluded to through Darling's vivid dreams of bulldozers that she experienced when she was younger. Darling remembers her past trauma through the bleary eyes of a child: "Then the lorries come carrying the police...and we run and hide inside the houses, but it's no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming" (67). The visual representation of innocent children screaming against the roars of massive bulldozers is powerful and painstaking. The repetition of the word "bulldozing" ingrains itself into the mind of the reader. The repeated word creates a visually charged image of Darling's home being demolished over and over, with each movement of the bulldozer another part of Darling's life is destroyed and smashed by the cold jaws of government ordered steel and the only thing that remains is the pulsating-painful memories that are on constant repeat in Darling's mind.

The memories of the bulldozers and their violent interjection into the lives of people in Zimbabwe were not just seen through the natives, but also displayed for the world to witness through the media. Darling reflects that: "Then later the people with cameras and T-shirts that say BBC and CNN come to shake their head and look and take our pictures...It's like a tsunami tore through this place, Jesus it's like a fucking tsunami tore this up" (69). A tsunami shows no mercy as it erupts from a ferocious quake within the earth and forcefully gushes onto land and destroys everything in its path, and that is exactly what the bulldozers backed by a corrupt government did to people and their lives. The force of the government was akin to a force of nature, like a tsunami, that is beyond the people's control. And it aired on television for the rest of the world to witness from the comfort of their couches within their still standing homes. The presence of the media in this passage represents the presence of a Western identity through major networks like the BBC and CNN.

The news anchor reports to the world about the human “tsunami” in Zimbabwe, Darling is in the background, she is unseen or unheard on the major news network. She and the aftermath of Operation Murambatsvina are captured in a still picture. She is a muted subaltern in the eyes and ears of the West. Bulawayo uses this passage and the naming of “The Bulldozers” to give Darling a voice and to reclaim the story through the eyes of a child that was standing behind the Western camera man and looking at the shambles of her once previous home. Bulawayo is illuminating Operation Murambatsvina from the point of a view of a native child in order to demonstrate the difference between clips on the news and watching your home being destroyed by your own government. The complete obliteration of Darling’s home, which then forced her and her mother to move to Paradise depicts the horrific effects that Operation Murambatsvina had on Zimbabwe and Darling’s life.

### **Paradise**

Paradise is a fictitious city that Darling and many others were forced by the government to live in after their homes were destroyed. Bulawayo could have chosen a real village in Zimbabwe or named Paradise something like “tin-shack Ville” but chose to use indirection with associating a village of poverty with a synonym for heaven. In naming Paradise as Darling’s land Bulawayo summons the reader to see this space as home and a form of paradise all its own to Darling. In the eyes of Western oppression Timothy Brennan discusses the “strategic geographical location, the idea of the third word is immensely important to the first, it is the image of the “loser” (62). Bulawayo choosing to name this village Paradise complicates what the Western image is of the third world is by challenging the reader to see where Darling lives outside of the realm of “loser” or Other and reclaiming it as a complex space filled with its own beauty, love, and government abandon.

Darling's Zimbabwe is estimated to be set between the years 2005-2008. She describes her home from a hilltop as: "Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry; ... The shacks themselves are terrible but from up here, they seem much better, almost beautiful even, it's like I'm looking at a painting" (36). The sheepskin metaphor that she uses invokes a visual of a land that is worn and tethered to the earth. Paradise has been traversed by many; the soil is not still or fragile but weathered like a drying sheepskin from the many people who were forced to make Paradise their new home. The physical distance that Darling is from Paradise gives her a different perspective on the land that is riddled with tin shacks, and instills an idyllic sense of home within her despite the land's flaws. Comparing her land to a painting, a work of art, allows Darling to parallel what the West would consider a desolate third world to something beautiful, like a painting that is revered and sought after.

The imagery and use of naming that signifies where Darling lives allows her to claim Paradise as her own and disrupts the image of Western oppression of seeing Darling's land as a "loser" or less than. Paradise also creates a space to tell the story of what happened to those whose homes were destroyed. The people of Paradise had their own homes demolished by their own government, the very entity that is supposed to work for their well-being. Although, Paradise may not be the perfect ideal of a functional city it is a home to many people. Paradise is described as having its own innate beauty, but when compared to the predominantly white fictitious city of Budapest the children find many dividing lines between race and wealth.

### **Budapest**

The reader is taken by Darling and her friends Chipso, Bastard, and Sbhoo into the fictitious city of Budapest as they scour the trees in the neighborhood for ripe guavas. At first read, one thinks that the novel is in the country of Hungary because of the name "Budapest", but

they are in Zimbabwe. Budapest as it appears in the novel, is a white dominant city down the road from Paradise that seeps wealth from almost every corner with its well-manicured lawns, imported cars, and beautiful homes. The actual city of Budapest is similar to the one in the novel as it is renowned for its beauty and for being an economic hub as it is one of the largest cities in Central Europe. The naming of this city is intertwined with representations of hungry children, Darling idolizing Budapest for all that it has and all she does not, and moving to the larger picture that shares historical similarities between Zimbabwe and the actual country of Hungary in the events of uprisings against oppression. Placing Darling in a fictitious city that symbolizes postcolonial struggle, mirrors the wealth and prosperity of Hungary, and exemplifies her own poverty allows Darling to have a place and reclaim a narrative within a social sphere of Budapest that thinks of the people of Paradise as an Other and Darling as a subaltern.

Arguably Bulawayo chose to name this space, where the upper class white people occupy, after a city in Hungary as it sounds similar to “hungry” to represent a division of race and economic status that has caused the natives of the land to live in poverty. Budapest is often a space where the children wander in search of guavas and in search of what a life outside of Paradise could look like. Darling describes the city as: “Budapest is big, big houses with satellite dishes on the roofs and neat graveled yards or trimmed lawns...the big trees heavy with fruit that’s waiting for us since nobody around here seems to know what to do with it” (5). The description that Darling gives of Budapest closely resembles middle-class suburbia with its manicured lawns and its large homes that tower over these small children wondering its streets. Darling’s explanation, specifically about the guava trees, also indicates the difference between the natives of the land and those who are foreigners because the foreigners do not appreciate nor know what to do with these overwhelming and delicious guava trees. The division between

Budapest and Paradise and more specifically between the white inhabitants and the natives is starkly made with this fictitious space that is representative of President Mugabe's rule and the effects of postcolonialism on Zimbabwe.

President Mugabe is infamous throughout Zimbabwe and the world for his thirty-three years (2015) of tyranny. Since 1987 Zimbabwe has struggled under the rule of President Robert Mugabe because of "his corrupt and authoritarian rule and its disregard for human rights that has both impoverished Zimbabwe and led to international condemnation" (Oxford Reference). Mugabe's appropriation of land and his attempts to eradicate poverty were to use violence against those of lower class to force them out of their homes and sell the land to white, primarily British, people. From the years "2000 until 2008, Zimbabwe experienced one of the most dramatic economic downsizings in modern history. Service provision (water, electricity, education, and health) all but collapsed, and widespread food insecurity became a new norm" (Kriger 1). Darling and her friends hungrily scampering through guava trees in Budapest is not just children on an adventure but hungry children in "Hungary" who are the byproduct of corrupt land appropriation and demonstrate the lack of accessibility to resources.

Darling and her friends are aware of the harsh circumstances of being displaced and the lack of resources that surround their lives. Even though their young selves have been exposed to harsh realities, Budapest also serves for them as an avenue of desire as well as the harsh reality of upward mobility. Sbho is enamored with the city of Budapest and imagines her life there, but is harshly reminded by Bastard that "Budapest is not a kaka toilet for anybody to just walk in, it's not like Paradise. You'll never live here" (14). Bastard is ten years old and he knows that because they are poor and black it is impossible for them to cross over the threshold of postcolonialism in Zimbabwe that keeps them separated into lands like Paradise. Darling, at a



later visit to Budapest in the novel sees a Lamborghini and associates the car to a symbol of American prosperity (even though it is a magnificent Italian car): “When I go live with Aunt Fostalina, that’s the kind of car I’ll drive...I just know, because of this feeling in my bones, that the car is waiting for me in America, so I yell, My Lamborghini, Lamborghini, Lamborghini, Reventon!” (113). The Lamborghini being placed in a space of wealth in Budapest and Darling equating the Italian car to a symbol of American abundance creates a divergence from her life in Paradise.

Many people began to revolt against the presence of the white colonists in their space and the government allowing this to happen. Budapest becomes not only a place of economic and social difference it is also a place where an uprising begins. This uprising is similar to The Hungarian Uprising of 1956 as both were fighting against oppression. The Hungarians against the Soviet Union and the people of Zimbabwe against the economic and social oppression their government has allowed with selling off their land. The children in the novel are far up in the trees when they see a band of men heading towards the neighborhood and bang on a door. A man answers and the boss proclaims: “Know this, you bloody colonist, from now on the black man is done listening you hear? This is black-man country and the black man is in charge now. Africa for Africans, the boss says to thunderous applause” (120). Within the novel Budapest has isolated Paradise and its people economically and socially. They want their country back, not just their land, but also their nationality and power. They no longer want to be an Other because they want to live in a “Africa for Africans” (120).

The couple that lives within the house becomes upset about the situation and the people at their door and demanding their country back. The band of men carry off the couple and there is a moment where Darling and the woman’s eyes meet while she sits in the guava tree. Darling

knows that “from the look, because eyes can talk, that she hates us, not just a little bit but a whole lot” (124). Darling knows that because of the color of her skin and who she is this woman automatically loathes her and what she stands for. The woman sees the native children hiding in the tree in her yard and she equates them to the next generation of people who, in her mind, do not belong in a place like Budapest. They are a voiceless subaltern in her eyes. The inherent problem that this moment coincides with is “the interference by white men into ‘their’ culture also catalyze[s] the opposition of colonized men” (Loomba 131). The tension from both the natives and the people of Budapest within the novel represent the struggle that Zimbabwe has endured for many years, even while it was Rhodesia, the tension of who controls what land and who has the power. In a powerless moment for Darling and the other children in the tree, Bulawayo tackles a major issue of racial tension and postcolonialism in Budapest. The naming of this place and how it signifies wealth, racial tension, and historical uprisings allows Darling to reclaim and be a part of history with reclaiming a Zimbabwe that has often been robbed of by the West.

### **We Need New Names**

The presence of the West and how it is idolized in the mind of Darling appears in the chapter “We Need New Names”. Bulawayo writes a very powerful scene that juxtaposes the innocence of a child alongside the preparation for an abortion. Darling’s eleven year old-pregnant friend named Chipso, who was raped by her grandfather, is a symbol of fleeting innocence. Darling and her friends Sbho and Forgiveness have decided to help Chipso get “rid of her stomach” (80) in the wee hours of the morning without any adults around to interfere. This chapter centers around three themes: juxtaposing innocent children against abortion and pregnancy through the naming of “the stomach”, the representation of Chipso as the muted

subaltern who is a victim of gender violence, and the way in which Bulawayo uses names in conjunction with the girls seeking a new identity that links them to idolized images of America. In this scene and its use of names Bulawayo is speaking to the larger implications of gender violence and the lack of healthcare resources in Zimbabwe as well as highlighting the false ideal these children hold with America as an entity of abundance and wealth while giving Darling her own narrative through names to describe these experiences.

Darling, Sbho, and Forgiveness are determined to help the pregnant Chipso and the way that they name her pregnancy as “the stomach” or “bulge” symbolizes their innocence and lack of understanding pregnancy. They charge themselves to help her because she cannot be carefree like them and easily climb guava trees and take part in their daily games. Darling declares that “today we are getting rid of Chipso’s stomach” (80) and she proclaims that their plan will end Chipso’s bulge, “once and for all” (80). The way in which Darling and the other girls refer to Chipso’s pregnancy as “the stomach” creates a powerful division in this chapter between the innocence of a child and that innocence coming up against arguably real implications of gender violence in Zimbabwe.

What finally pushes the girls to “get rid of Chipso’s stomach” is the fear that she will die. The girls believe that Chipso will die from her swollen belly because they “heard the women talking yesterday about Nosizi...[she] is dead now, from giving birth. It kills like that” (80). The young and malleable minds of the children overhearing about a woman dying from giving birth instantly makes it fact that Chipso will die because all pregnancy, “kills like that” (80). Darling’s mindset is not far from the truth, as research has shown that “almost all maternal deaths (99%) occur in developing countries. More than half of these deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa” (World Health Organization). In the fictitious village of Paradise which is located in the country

of Zimbabwe (classified as sub-Saharan Africa), in some rural areas medical resources are practically non-existent, which could leave many women in distress if they encountered complications with their pregnancies. In this moment of contemplating Chipo's death Darling is clamoring between the innocence of a child and being shoved into adulthood with the harsh realities of her eleven year old friend being pregnant and the larger implications of women dying from childbirth.

These girls are the game changers for Chipo. They acknowledge the fact that Chipo has a protruding stomach and that she is pregnant, which could equal death in their minds. In the novel thus far, no other adults have acknowledged that Chipo is pregnant. The young and innocent child named Chipo walks around Paradise carrying a child of her own. No adults ever question how and by whom did an eleven year old girl become impregnated. Chipo did not speak for many months as her belly grew and one day in a fit of tears she screamed to Darling that, "He did that, my grandfather" (42) as she pointed to her stomach and continued sobbing, "my grandfather was there and got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain" (42-43). Chipo was smothered out by her grandfather as her innocence was robbed. The imagery of her grandfather as an overwhelming and strong force crushing down upon her like forceful and unstoppable rock commands the reader into Chipo's crumbling world of rape and child pregnancy. Chipo occupies a space as a pregnant girl in Paradise that is "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman'" (Spivak 102). Chipo's existence lives in a chasm of a once colonized Zimbabwe to being pushed into Paradise by Mugabe's bulldozers. She is seen as an object of violent patriarchy, a pregnant object, that is

only noticed by children who are the ones that are often rendered the most voiceless when it comes to the “third-world woman” (Spivak 102). And it is within Bulawayo’s writing that these children who are helping Chipso are given a voice and a chance to acknowledge Chipso and speak to the larger implications of gender violence in Zimbabwe through the naming of “the stomach”.

Chipso’s experience and her pregnancy calls attention to the problem of gender violence. In sub-Saharan Africa: “Since age 16, 42 percent of the [1000] women interviewed reported..., 39 percent specific acts of economic violence, 37 per cent of specific acts of sexual violence and 32 percent specific acts of physical violence” (Hof and Richters 56). In a patriarchal land such as depicted in *Paradise*, Chipso has gone unnoticed until now. Darling was the first one that Chipso broke her silence to about the rape and now Darling is the one who will help save her from her “stomach”. Darling, Sbho, and Forgiveness begin the preparations to get rid of Chipso’s pregnancy. The three girls begin to collect eclectic items strewn about on the ground around in hopes that what they are gathering will help Chipso:

Forgiveness has found a rusted clothes hanger and she is busy with it. We don’t ask her what it’s for...Sbho emerges from behind a bush carrying a twisted metal cup, half of a man’s brown belt, and a purple thingy I don’t know what it is...Chipso is smiling up at us, and we know she’s happy about not dying, and we know we are not going to let her die...” (81-82)

Each of the girls with their own convictions has found items that they have deemed necessary to help Chipso. To an adult the imagery of seeing a rusty clothes hanger is symbolic of tools that were used to perform illegal abortions. The sight of this type of tool in the hands of the young Forgiveness who is preparing to use it on a pregnant child once again juxtaposes the innocence of a child up against harsh realities of pregnancy that Chipso is facing. The name Forgiveness that

Bulawayo chooses to give the girl who is holding the rusty clothes hanger is also symbolic of a form of absolution for Chipó and that she will no longer be punished with the swollen stomach that her grandfather is responsible for.

The process to “get rid of the stomach” (80) is in its next phase and each of the girls need new names in order to really fulfill their roles as the doctors who are going to help the patient, Chipó. The girls mimic a brief glimpse that Forgiveness had of American pop culture from the show *ER*. The girls begin massaging Chipó’s stomach because Forgiveness “saw it on TV in Harare when I visited... *ER* is what they do in a hospital in America” (84) and they now need the names of doctors in order to really morph into the American doctors. Forgiveness becomes Dr. Cutter because of the swiping motions that she continues to do on Chipó’s stomach, Darling becomes Dr. Roz because she is tall, and Sbho becomes Dr. Bullet because she is small and fast. The girls undergo a metamorphosis by taking on the names associated with America as it holds a promise of new bodies and new beginnings from another space and another land. Their imaginations combined with their new names transcend them into another place where Chipó is no longer helpless and they are her saviors, just like the doctors on American television. The doctors not only have the knowledge to save Chipó but they also have confidence as their new names ties them to a land that they consider knowledgeable and full of resources, just like *ER*.

The girls are charged with confidence with their new American names and the ideals of America that Darling holds also takes on a form of comfort for Chipó. As the girls are almost ready for the operation Chipó becomes frightened and wants “a proper doll with a battery that you can turn off when you want it to stop crying” (86). The imagery of a pregnant child that desires a doll, a toy to play with speaks to Chipó’s innocence and her young mind that has not fully comprehended that she herself will have a child and all of the responsibility and crying that

comes with it. Darling promises Chipó that, “When I go live with Aunt Fostalina in America I’ll send you the doll. There are lots of nice things over there” (86). Darling’s child-like imaginative ideal of what America is like, a land filled with nice things that she can finally have and share with her friend Chipó that is coupled with sitting next to her young pregnant friend under the name of Dr. Roz speaks to Darling’s ideals that she maintains with American life.

Naming continues in this scene as they prepare to help Chipó their innocence and the larger problem with gender recognition is revealed as they refer to Chipó’s vagina as “thing” (87). This naming not only indicates the euphemisms that children give genitals, it also speaks to how the female form is known as an object and not an actual organ and a part of their body. Dr Cutter (Forgiveness) begins to tug at Chipó’s shorts and explains that: “The clothes hanger goes through the thing. You push it in until all of it disappears inside; it reached deep into the stomach, where the baby is, hooks it, and then you can pull it out. I know because I overheard my sister and her friend talking about how it is done” (87). The vagina is given a vague nickname which could indicate an amount of shame and taboo surrounding sexuality and female anatomy. The use of the word “thing” also correlates to Chipó’s pregnancy, as to where nobody in Paradise acknowledged its existence except the children who also gave her pregnancy the name of “stomach”.

The girls are once again, like aforementioned with pregnancy equaling death, overhearing adults talk and incorporating the adults conversation into their procedure to help Chipó. Little do the little doctors know that what they are about to do could cause death: “Mortality and morbidity from unsafe abortion is highly prevalent with an estimated 200,000 annual deaths globally, most occurring in sub-Saharan Africa” (World Health Organization). The circumstances in Paradise and greater parts of Zimbabwe limit a woman’s choice to a safe

abortion and many women have died from unsafe practices. The girls sit in silence after Dr. Cutter's explanation of what the rusty clothes hanger will do to Chipó. This moment it begins to sink in for Darling that the plan to help Chipó will not work and that they have gone too far. Darling knows that the clothes hanger going into Chipó will not help her.

Towards the end of this scene a matronly figure of Paradise, named MotherLove, walks upon the girls holding a rusty clothes hanger while Chipó lays on the ground. Her presence and her name signifies a maternal-adult existence and one of nurture. MotherLove assess her surroundings with a sharp eye and an emotionless face as the girls await their judgment. She picks up the clothes hanger and Forgiveness spouts off that "we were trying to remove Chipó's stomach... Then she bursts into tears. Chipó raises her voice and starts to wail" (89). Forgiveness was sure of herself as Dr. Cutter and preparing to thrust the clothes hanger into Chipó's "thing" (87) but now Forgiveness is transformed back into a child, she is no longer a doctor on *ER*, she is a small child who is at the mercy of an adult. MotherLove does not speak and "there are tears in the eyes and she is clutching her chest like there's a fire inside it" (90). She reaches out and clutches Chipó and they both wail together. MotherLove is the first adult within the novel to acknowledge Chipó's pregnancy and she is also the first one to truly grasp the weight that Chipó carries as she weeps with her. The name, MotherLove, becomes fitting for this character as she takes on a maternal role and comforts Chipó with something that she so desperately needs, love.

The chapter does not end with the weeping Chipó and MotherLove, but it ends with another symbol, a butterfly. As the girls watch the embrace between Chipó and MotherLove, Darling sees, "A purple lucky butterfly sits at the top of Chipó's head and when it flies away...we are all chasing the butterfly and screaming out for luck" (90). The butterfly and how it symbolizes luck for Darling morphs the ending of the chapter back into the lighthearted mind



of a child. They chase the butterfly with the same amount of passion that they chased the idea of “getting rid of the stomach” (80) and creating new names to align themselves with America.

The name of this chapter sharing the same name of the title of the novel illustrates the way in which Darling is seeking a way to connect to America and to rename her own personal history with Zimbabwe. The names that have been given to Darling and Zimbabwe as a whole by the West furthers Othering and treating her as less than because she is from a place that namely poor, desolate, underprivileged, and diseased. Seeking new names, specifically in this chapter with associating themselves with the Western media through the television show *ER*, complicates the privileged child narration. Boehmer explains how “colonized peoples were represented as lesser: less human, less civilized, as child or savage, wild man, animal, or headless mass” (76). Bulawayo challenges these images of colonized people by presenting this chapter centered on children and their youthful and individualized dialogue that speaks to the larger issues of maternal care in Zimbabwe through using names, such as Dr. Roz. Darling and her friends are far from savages as they risked it all to save Chipso and they transformed themselves with new names in order to do so.

### **The Sickness**

Bulawayo continues to use names to address the larger issues of healthcare in Zimbabwe as well as the individual narrative of a loved one lost to AIDS. She expresses the effect of AIDS and its cultural taboo with naming it “The Sickness” in the novel. Similar to how Bulawayo unnamed Operation Murambatsvina with calling it “The Bulldozers” she is changing the narrative surrounding AIDS in Zimbabwe by purposefully calling attention to the euphemism that surrounds a deadly disease from the perspective of a child. By naming AIDS “The Sickness” Bulawayo is signifying the pandemic of AIDS in Zimbabwe, the cultural taboo that surrounds

AIDS, and how it is used to Other Zimbabwe in the eyes of the West.

Darling's father returns to Paradise from South Africa with AIDS and Darling hides her father from her friends out of shame. Her friends know that: "It's your father in there. He has the Sickness, we know, Godknows says" (101) and that there is "no use hiding the AIDS Stina says. When he mentions the Sickness by name, I feel a shortness of breath. I look around to see if there are other people within earshot" (102). One can feel the burning insecurity and fear that Darling has when Stina abruptly and sharply announces that Darling's father has AIDS. The lengths of secrecy that Darling goes to hide her father from others and even from herself are indicated by the fact that she will not admit to herself that her father has AIDS, she instead calls it "The Sickness". This creates a space of denial and cultural taboo between Darling and her father. The concept of "The Sickness" is a powerful form of imagery that Bulawayo uses through naming that also represents real circumstances that exist in Zimbabwe.

Mugabe's lack of appropriating funds to healthcare has also resulted in Zimbabwe suffering from a pandemic of AIDS and only over the last decade has there been a decrease in people suffering from AIDS. Research has shown that "the estimated number of adults (15–49 years) living with HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe increased from 10,000 in 1984 to 1,710,000 in 1997 and 1998, thereafter decreasing to 1,391,397 in 2005" (Mushongah 556). Although the number of people with AIDS has decreased it is still a major issue in Zimbabwe. Because of the amount of people in Zimbabwe that are affected by AIDS it has created a cultural taboo to where people refer to AIDS by other names as seen reflected in the novel by the name, "The Sickness". In interviews conducted surrounding the taboo of AIDS during "2006–2007 people often used euphemisms, metaphors and colloquial expressions in research discussions and interviews when the subject of HIV/AIDS came up" (Mushongah 560). Mugabe's disregard for human life and

well-being has crippled Zimbabwe for decades which has led many to suffer physically and culturally as they are deemed as a contagious cast away.

The call that Bulawayo makes with signifying AIDS through naming it “The Sickness” rattles the image the West holds with Zimbabwe and the entire continent of Africa when it comes to the topic of AIDS. This disease is often associated with Africa as a whole through Western main stream culture, which continues to reinforce Othering of Zimbabwe and Africa. Bulawayo takes the individual account of a child watching her father die through naming and bringing the reader into the privileged child narrative. By focusing on Darling’s singular account with AIDS she is arguably making a statement about AIDS: it is a real problem in Zimbabwe but it is not just a passing topic on the news, it affects people on individual levels. These people are fathers and daughters and not just Africa as a whole.

### **Bornfree**

Darling and those around her have endured their homes being ripped to shreds, suffered the loss of loved ones to AIDS, and had their own land taken away from them. Because of this the adults in her country conjured up the will and the need for change with the upcoming election. They rallied for a better life. Bornfree is a young male that lives in Paradise and became a ringleader for change as he united people in Paradise to see how life could be better if they voted in the election. His name symbolizes the chance for a re-birth of Paradise into a land of freedom. A place where people are no longer stripped of their independence and can live in a state of democracy instead of the tyranny of Mugabe. The 2008 election and Mugabe is alluded to but never specifically named in the novel as the narration is from the perspective of a young child that could not vote nor could really comprehend politics. The symbolism of Bornfree’s name combined with Darling’s child view of the election reclaims a personal narrative in

Zimbabwean history of the 2008 election that would decide the freedom of the Zimbabwean people.

Darling and her friends are given the task by Bornfree to hang posters about the upcoming election. Darling complacently thinks, “We hear about change, about new country, about democracy, about elections and what-what” (138). Darling ends her train of thought with “what-what” meaning that she has been hearing about change and elections for weeks from the murmurs of the adults around her, but she has more important things to address like, when are her and her friends going to go pick guavas again? In the midst of a possible major change within the country that she lives in that has suffered under the tyranny of a corrupt government, Darling still remains an innocent child who is unaware of the political turmoil that surrounds her.

Around 2008, many people in Zimbabwe began to form an opposition to Mugabe for his tyrannical rule over Zimbabwe, similar to how it is portrayed in the novel by the people in Paradise. The Movement for Democratic Change was formed in 1999 and Morgan Tsvangirai was head of the party who lead the opposition to Mugabe with backing from the majority of the Zimbabwean people. In March of 2008 an election was held but Mugabe committed voter fraud stopping Tsvangirai from winning. Violence and protests broke out across the country over the election resulting in Mugabe creating the position of Prime Minister for Tsvangirai but still maintaining control of the presidency to this year (2015). Mugabe’s enforcers swept across the country and murdered many people who spoke out against him.

Mugabe’s thugs are also represented in the novel. A few weeks after the election happened Bornfree had been taken and beaten to death, “The sign on Bornfree’s grave says BORNFREE LIZWE TAPERA, 1983-2008, RIP OUR HERO DIED FOR CHANGE” (141). Bornfree was revered as a hero by the people of Paradise as he fearlessly hung posters,

encouraged people to make the day long trek on foot to vote, and did all of this knowing that if found he would be more than likely killed. Bornfree died a hero because he did not waver, not even for a moment under the oppressing reign of the government. Darling was present at his funeral as well as the Western presence of a BBC photographer that “clicks away at his camera like he is possessed” (138). The news rapidly clicked pictures of the funeral trying to find the one shot that could land them the most news as Darling watched from a tree that hovered over the cemetery. The pictures taken by the news would never be able to truly capture Darling’s relationship with Bornfree as she helped hang the posters that ultimately cost him his life. Bornfree died free. His life was taken because of his devotion to freedom and the lives, like Darling’s, that he interacted with could never be captured by the still footage of the BBC.

### **Them and They**

Mugabe maintained his hold of power with the election in 2008. He continued to maintain a chokehold on his people and perpetuated economic instability which caused people to leave in droves in search of a better place to live. Zimbabwe is no stranger to diaspora as throughout its history of being colonized as Rhodesia and then under the tyrannical rule of Mugabe, people have left their homeland in search of somewhere better. The movement that takes place within this chapter and the use of the collective voice is parallel to “some of the features commonly ascribed to a diaspora such as involuntary and voluntary dispersion of the population from the homeland... and uneasy relationship with the host land” (Pasura 1). Bulawayo does not use specific names like the ones previously discussed to describe this movement, the pronouns of “they” and “them” are attributed to people from a third person omniscient voice to describe their physical and emotional journey.

Bulawayo maneuvers the reader into a position of looking at this massive departure of

people as she gives the reader access to their emotional resiliency and the barriers that they will have to overcome. She writes, “look at them leaving in droves, the children of the land, just look at them leaving in droves. Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders” (147). Bulawayo implores the reader to “look at them” (147) not once but twice in the passage, not to just glance at these people leaving but to really look and see these people as children of the land dispersing. Their land, or motherland, is losing its own children to other borders in massive numbers. It does not matter if they have anything, they have to cross because it is imperative to leave.

Even though “they” are leaving to hopefully go to a place that will give them a better life there are still obstacles that they will face once across the border. Bulawayo captures these future difficulties : “look at them leaving in droves despite knowing they will be welcomed with restraint in those strange lands because they do not belong, knowing they will have to sit on one buttock because they must not sit comfortably lest they be asked to rise and leave...” (148). Bulawayo speaks for the collective movement and foresees that they will not be greeted with open arms in whatever place they end. The “uneasy relationship with the host land” (Pasura 1) is perfectly described within the passage as the inability to sit as an equal and the constant state of being on edge in case one has to leave immediately because of who they are and where they come from. In this short chapter Bulawayo captures an overall sense of diaspora and the emotional turmoil that causes one to leave their motherland and to sit uneasy in a foreign land.

It could be argued that the way Bulawayo chooses to name this diasporic movement and the people within it as “they” and “them” furthers the mentality of Othering as it is not individualized and they are nameless faces wandering from their unspecified homeland. The point of her writing is to create an individualized narrative from Darling’s point of view that

allows her to reclaim the Zimbabwean immigrant experience from the clutches of a Western view of Othering. However, Bulawayo capturing the characteristics of diaspora by giving the reader access to their outward movements and inner personal moments of rejection from their new home allows the reader to see much more than just someone leaving their homeland. This short chapter stops the reader to really “look at them” (147) beyond the lines of the novel and to see “How They Left” as a real movement of people.

### **Destroyedmichygen**

Darling is included in the “How They Left” chapter as her mother sent her to live with her Aunt in Michigan. As previously mentioned, Darling refers to Detroit, Michigan as Destroyedmichygen. The general elections in Zimbabwe that were referenced in the novel took place on March 29, 2008 and Darling left shortly after the elections, which places her arriving in America in 2008 during the American financial crisis. The Great Recession “began with the bursting of an 8 trillion dollar housing bubble” and “in 2008 and 2009, the U.S. labor market lost 8.4 million jobs” (EPI.org). Darling left her economically debilitated homeland of Zimbabwe and entered another country that was in an economic downfall. Detroit, Michigan became “destroyed” by the Great Recession as the economy crippled Detroit’s pillar of being the capital of the automotive industry. The naming of Destroyedmichygen signifies the economically destroyed city that she now lives in and it also demonstrates how Darling’s ideals of America are beginning to crumble as she navigates through missing home and figuring out who she is in this new land.

Darling’s entire being underwent a great shock from moving from Zimbabwe to Michigan. Her cousin, T.K., explained it to her that “this is America yo, you won’t see none of that African shit up in this motherfucker” (149). Darling’s friends, land, weather, and guavas all

ceased to exist. She describes it like “we are in a terrible story, like we’re in the crazy parts of the Bible, there where God is busy punishing people for their sins and is making them miserable with all the weather” (153). Darling’s journey has brought her from her warm-beloved but torn land of Paradise to a city in the United States that is suffering the collapse of the auto and housing industry while it pours snow and freezing weather down upon her, destroying any notions that she once had about this place.

The Western reader, more specifically a reader in the United States, could easily understand the name of Destroyedmichygen in the context of the Great Recession; however this name is not just speaking to a financial crisis but also a crisis of Darling finding her footing in a foreign land. Boehmer states that “critics therefore feel able to identify with migrant writings because they occupy more or less the same cosmopolitan sphere as the author” (229). Bulawayo is arguably drawing the Western reader in with this name and its reference to a recent financial crash and she is also giving Darling the chance to express her destroyed ideals about America from the perspective of an immigrant. This name connects both the Western sphere of Detroit, Michigan and the Zimbabwean immigrant narrative to demonstrate that Michigan being financially destroyed is only a part of the story of Darling navigating through destroyed ideals.

### **My America**

Darling refers to America in the novel as “My America” which represents how Darling views America as a place that is all hers for the taking. That name and America itself belongs to her. Darling’s image of what America is like does begin to fade as she is in Detroit. In Darling’s America she is trying to find a place between assimilating with the reality of America not being how she imagined and trying to stay connected to her loved ones back home. The way that Bulawayo portrays this relationship with Detroit and the struggle that immigrants face with



maintaining relationships back home through naming reclaims an immigrant's emotional experience of being in a foreign land.

The neighborhood where Darling lives with her aunt, uncle, and cousin is described as being dark, grey, rundown, and with gunshots echoing through the night. The letters Darling would send back home purposefully “left out these things, and a lot more, because they embarrassed me, because they made America not feel like My America, the one that I had always dreamed of back in Paradise” (190). The reality of America disrupts the dream that Darling has in her mind of a place that she thought was filled with dolls and Lamborghini's for the taking. Darling's perspective of America is from the view of a child but the thinking of America being a land that represents the possibility of wealth and abundance is an ideal that Bulawayo is challenging, the idea of easy upward mobility with the name “My America”. Immigrants can face racism, xenophobia, and the challenge of securing financial stability. America, at times, is misrepresented as the land of opportunity and prosperity that draws on the ideal of America being there for the taking by anyone. Bulawayo is using this as a way to speak to false notions of upward mobility and abundance in America.

Darling is coming to the realization that her America is not what she imagined and she longs for home. She desires a way to connect with the people around her in “My America” but as she begins to immerse herself in American culture she finds her relationships back in Paradise floundering. She is torn between the “one part that is yearning for my friends; the other does not know how to connect with them anymore, as if they are people that I have never met” (212). Anthony Appiah, whose family is from Ghana, relates that he “like many, return[s] there from time to time, to visit family and friends. And like many, when I am there I feel both that I do and that I don't belong” (90-91). Darling is already in land that treats her as an Other and the name of

“My America” reclaims her space in America along with all of the emotional turmoil that she experiences with being torn between home and her new home.

### **Rihanna**

Darling is interacting with her new home as a young teenager and with that comes pop culture and music. The significance of the name Rihanna, a pop star who is from Barbados, in the novel opens up a narrative that speaks to racism and gender violence, and the difference that wealth and popularity in the West makes in being recognized. Darling and her friends decided to steal a car from their friends’ mom to go to the mall. In this short trip Darling goes through the emotional roller coaster of fear because of the color of her skin as well as thinking about how America maintains a “West and the rest” mentality by focusing in on just what is important and relevant to America and virtually neglecting global issues. All of these narratives arise beginning with a song from Rihanna playing on the radio.

The name of Rihanna becomes a signifier of how America reacts to gender violence committed on a wealthy and famous pop star compared to gender violence everywhere else in the world. While hearing a song on the radio Darling thinks that she is “sick of the whole Rihanna business...I know her crazy boyfriend beat her up but I don’t think she had to be all over, like her face was a humanitarian crisis, like it was the Sudan or something” (220). Gender violence committed against any woman should be immediately addressed and dealt with no matter where it occurred. Darling’s narrative is speaking to the sense of commodity and objectification that surrounds Rihanna by the reaction of the media. Rihanna is from Barbados which was colonized by the British and from a young age she has been able to make a name for herself in the music industry and in America. She comes from a place that is colonized. Her name is associated with her music, popularity, and now with the abuse from her then boyfriend.

Rihanna's name in American culture is associated with the object of sensationalism surrounding her fame and life and not her as a person.

The attention surrounding the name of Rihanna compared to the women of Sudan that Darling mentions continues to further how women from colonized countries or from countries within the continent of Africa are Othered. Western media outlets have covered stories about women in Sudan and the violence that they endure. For example, *The Guardian*, wrote an article in September of 2014 and brought attention to the fact that women in Sudan, "who fled the fighting to live in camps on UN bases risk harassment and sexual attack whenever they leave their tents" (Green). However, the basis of how much attention Rihanna's story of abuse and the women of Sudan get are extremely tipped on Rihanna's side. Objectification of Rihanna's status in America as a commodity has much to do with the tipping of the scales. The issue that Rihanna's name is raising in the novel is not about whether or not Rihanna's abuse should be discussed but how the abuse that happens in other parts of the world that are deemed "third-world" do not gather as much attention because Sudan is deemed an Other.

As Rihanna's song on the radio comes to an end the girls in the car hear police sirens and immediately know that because of the color of their skin that they are at risk. They know that they are seen as black, not African, but more than likely assumed they are "African American" because they are a black person in America. Darling thinks about "opening the door and running, just running, but then I remember that the police will shoot you for doing a little thing like that if you are black, so I sit in the car..." (221). Throughout the novel Darling has come up against forces and people that treat her as less than because of her Zimbabwean nationality and now she experiences another level of the West, specifically America, treating her as guilty because of the color of her skin. According to the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*,

“African Americans now constitute nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population” (naacp.org). Darling and her friends’ fears of the police are based off of very real circumstances that surround incarceration and racism in America. The narrative that Bulawayo is providing through Rihanna’s name in this section address the issues of objectification, gender violence, and racism. Incorporating Rihanna’s name and abuse into the narrative opens up the larger issues of how the West continues to perpetuate Othering based off a person’s skin and ethnicity.

### We

Bulawayo refers again to the collective voice to speak to the immigrant as a whole and their struggles living in America. Bulawayo’s writing is geared towards individualizing Darling’s experience and life in Zimbabwe and America through names, that to revert to a pronoun that is collective seems counterintuitive, at first glance. Arguably, Bulawayo is reclaiming Darling’s story through names as well as writing in an inclusive voice for all immigrants to reclaim their stories. Bulawayo states that even though “Darling is Zimbabwean,... it is my hope that she is also Mexican and Indian and British, that she is from anywhere else where people live and hope and dream and leave. I hope she speaks to you” (4). In this chapter the collective voice begins with addressing the Western view of Othering by showing how people think Zimbabwe is not its own country, but just Africa. The narration then moves to include experiences that many immigrants go through with assimilating to America and learning how to survive. The naming of all immigrants as a “We” provides a tone of togetherness as immigrants maneuver through misunderstandings of who they are as people.

Bulawayo writes the collective assumptions from the Western view about how people react when they hear that someone is from Zimbabwe:

Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there were dissidents shove AK-47's between women's legs? We smile. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them in prison and all, where they are dying of cholera-oh my God, yes, we've seen your country, it's been on the news" (239-240)

After each claim that was made about Zimbabwe the words "we smiled" appear. The smile is not one of understanding but out of annoyance. It signifies the tired feeling of continuously having to explain that not everything that happens in Africa happens in Zimbabwe and that what is represented on the news is not always a factual account of how things really are. Bulawayo is attempting to dismantle false assumptions about immigrants and where they come from. To individualize Darling's experience. Appiah explains that the problem "isn't the belief that other people don't matter at all; it's the belief that they don't matter very much" (153). The West sees the sensationalism of Africa or Zimbabwe splattered across the news with corrupt elections, death, and violence and those images become imbedded facts. Yes, Zimbabwe has experienced violence, corrupt elections, and death, however those situations do not entirely make up who Darling or the "we" immigrant is as a person.

The collective voice continues on with explaining how the immigrant experiences oppression in America with the way that they have to earn a living. The oppression takes on the form of "low paying jobs. Back breaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow" (246). Bulawayo uses the imagery of oppression taking on a gruesome form that gnaws at the immigrant and feasts upon their work with a ravenous hunger. Bulawayo is describing the immigrant as subdued to an inhuman state because "they see themselves as still-colonized, always invaded, never free of a history of white occupation"

(Boehmer 221). The “we” that Bulawayo is addressing in the novel is not inclusive of every single immigrant that has come to America. Every person has their own story and their own experiences. Bulawayo is addressing the immigrant that is still treated as if they are colonized, captive, and treated like an animal-a work horse. The subaltern immigrant. The name of “we” that Bulawayo uses is to give the immigrant a voice as they “clean toilets and pick tobacco and fruit in the fields” (246). Bulawayo is letting them know that somebody is listening and that she is writing to give them a voice in a place that ceases to acknowledge their existence as actual human beings. The immigrant being a part of a “we” begins to separate them from being a voiceless sub-human in Western mentality.

### Cornell

As Darling ages throughout the novel she works many jobs for extra money, similar to the “we” immigrant. Darling finds herself in a similar social sphere like Paradise and Budapest that exacerbates her rank on the social ladder in America. Spivak perfectly describes Darling’s situation with, “if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways” (90). Because of Darling’s economic status, race, and gender she has been put on the lowest rung of the social ladder in America and has been muted from ever having a say in how she is treated or seen in the eyes of the West. Darling finds herself reading Kate’s journal, the daughter of the man whose house she is cleaning, and discovers that Kate has been starving herself because her boyfriend said that she was not “sexy enough”. In this scene Darling not only finds Kate’s woes unreal because of her own hard circumstances she also uses the name of Cornell to connect to memories back home and then to confront Kate on her own privilege. Darling’s voice emerges.

Kate enters the kitchen where Darling is cleaning and makes her breakfast which consists of five raisins, in order to slim down for her boyfriend. Darling notices that Kate “is wearing

Bastard's Cornell shirt (269). In Paradise a non-profit charity referred to as the NGO (non-governmental organization) would come and give the children clothes and Bastard wore a Cornell shirt. Darling is thinking back to the time that, "Bastard [wore] black tracksuit bottoms and a faded orange T-shirt that says Cornell" (14). The prestigious university of Cornell does not just signify a college to Darling, it signifies the friendships and hardships that she endured in Paradise. The emblem of this Western entity of higher education being placed on the skin of Bastard in a rural village in Zimbabwe contrasts the stark differences between the abundance available to certain people of the West and the hardship of Paradise.

Darling has had just about enough of Kate's problems. Throughout the novel Darling has had many insightful thoughts about how the West views her and treats her but until now she never said them out loud. She says to Kate:

Because, Miss I want to Be Sexy there is this: You have a fridge bloated with food so no matter how much you starve yourself, you'll never know real , true hunger. Look around you, and you have all these riches you don't even need; upstairs, your bed is fit for a king; you go to Cornell, where you can be anything you want; you don't even have to clean up after yourself because I'm doing it for you, right now, you have a dog whose wardrobe I couldn't afford; and what more, you're here, living in your own country of birth, so just exactly what is your real problem? (270)

The subaltern girl from Paradise found a way convey the atrocities that she faced and she also puts a perspective in place for those who have never experienced true hardship in their life. To answer Spivak's question and essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Yes, Spivak, the subaltern can speak in this moment. Darling spoke for all of the times she went hungry, the clothes that she got from the NGO, and the constant worry of how she is going to get by in America.

The name of Cornell is also seen as a symbol of upward mobility that Darling has not been granted. Darling is beginning to come out of the binds of the muted subaltern that everyone always seems to forget about. She speaks for the “women of colour [who] have also had to challenge the colour-blindness of Euro-American feminist theory and movements” (Loomba 139). Darling’s story and her experiences in America have not been difficult just because she is a female, but because she is a black-female from Zimbabwe. She is an individual with a complex story and a complex history with the West that does not just equate to her gender. Taking in the individualized account and history of all aspects of Darling and her identity is the beginning to mending the harm that Othering Zimbabwe and placing Darling in a subaltern position have done. Darling was seen and heard in that moment and it was a new beginning for her.

### **Conclusion**

Bulawayo does not end the novel with a “happily ever after” ending. The reader is left with Darling trying to figure out if she wants to go to college and a memory of her friends back home. The ending is not conclusive in a traditional form because Darling’s story is ongoing and will always be in process. The story of anyone is always ongoing. Bulawayo challenges the ideals of easy upward mobility by leaving the reader with Darling not owning a Lamborghini or being wealthy but attempting to figure out what her next step is in her life in America. The story is also left open ended arguably so that the reader can continue the dialogue of how an individual like Darling and her story can be a jumping off point to mend the damage that has been done by Othering entire countries as well as ushering in support to those who begin to submerge from the oppressive state of subaltern.

Towards the end of the novel Darling is confronted by Chipu on Skype about where her loyalties and interests lie now that she is in America. Chipu asks Darling, “Why did you just



leave? If it's your country, you have to live in it and not leave it. You have to fight for it no matter what, to make it right" (288). Bulawayo is fighting for her country and trying to make it right with reclaiming a narrative through Darling and using the names of The Sickness, Rhianna, or Cornell to challenge the Western discourses that have taken those stories from so many. Darling's story is a challenge to the oppressive Western discourses that misrepresent Zimbabwe through the lens of a camera, a headline in a newspaper, or an ideal of misguided representations.

The journey of Darling from Paradise to Destroyedmichygen is not just an immigrant experience, it is reclaiming a story from colonists, racists, and the media. Bulawayo creates new names in order to create a new space for the Zimbabwean/postcolonial novel. Bulawayo also creates a charged dialogue through the privileged voice of a child. The narrative of Darling is one that pushes through the social barricades of Othering and the subaltern and into a realm of an individualized story. Darling's story has been captured by the Western media and her country has been categorized into a generic form through the news portrayed through a Western lens and constricted mentalities that the West holds with countries and people they deem less civilized. The names that Darling uses to reclaim Zimbabwe and her immigrant experience as her own ultimately signify Darling's individuality and her individual story that she charges with new names. Names that are all her own and names that are a part of her history and story.

Spivak has discussed throughout her career that the subaltern cannot speak when an oppressive force does it for them. Spivak's concerns echo throughout Bulawayo's writing as Darling watched from the trees, behind cameramen, and politely smiled as those around her told the story of Zimbabwe, as they created an image of the Other, and as they spoke for Zimbabwe. Bulawayo also complicates this as she devotes an entire novel to those stories from the perspective of a child who grows throughout the novel and finds her voice emerging. The

narrative that Darling holds slashes through the images of Zimbabwe and Africa as an Other that is filled with people who are deemed “diseased” or “savages” because Darling is an individual with her own story that challenges linear narratives imposed by the West. Darling is still in a place of what would be deemed a subaltern by the end of the novel. She is female, black, and of low economic status. Bulawayo does not create a false ideology of Darling’s story as she still remains as a subaltern but she does also write for Darling to begin to change and find power within her voice. Finding her voice was a journey from Paradise to Destroyedmichygen that Darling had to navigate through racism, broken ideals, missing home, and discovering who she is. Bulawayo acknowledges that upward mobility is not easy, breaking from being classified as a subaltern is not done overnight, and that Darling does reclaim her history and story from the oppressive forces that have silenced her for so long. Darling can speak for herself and for those, like her, who are often overlooked.

The complex history and naming that Bulawayo weaves throughout the novel and tells through the voice of a child makes the novel even more moving to read. Darling’s voice is straightforward and sincere. One is captured, one is jolted, and one is emotionally swept into the history of Zimbabwe and a girl finding a voice and who she is. Darling does not just stay within the pages of the novel, she morphs into the tears you shed after you close the book, the breaths you take in while trying to internalize all that has happened in her story, and her voice and story echoes in your ears long after the novel has been closed.

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